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ABSTRACT

This guide is intended to offer suggestions for enhancing educational opportunities for young children in Iowa with special needs in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as required by both state and federal law in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act as amended in 1997 (IDEA 97). Emphasis is on IDEA 97's definition and implementation of LRE and what is needed to ensure that 3- to-5-year-olds with disabilities flourish in the general education environment. The guide is organized into four sections which focus on four steps in the process of developing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs): (1) developing sound IEPs; (2) seeking appropriate learning environments; (3) obtaining funding; and (4) ensuring implementation. Each section identifies what the law says, explains what the law intends, and highlights best practices. Among seven appendices are: a review of research supporting inclusion and identifying leadership qualities, the Iowa educational setting codes, a survey form for evaluating the appropriateness of providing special education services in the general education setting, a list of state resources, Iowa teacher license requirements, and sample agency-to-agency contracts. (DB)

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Thrive

A Guide to Providing Educational Opportunities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for Iowa's Preschoolers with Disabilities

Iowa Department of Education
Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services
August 1999

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3-4-5
Thrive

A Guide to Providing Educational Opportunities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for Iowa's Preschoolers with Disabilities

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PREFACE

Iowa is a great state in which to raise a family, especially a family that includes a child with special needs. Building on a long tradition of serving children with disabilities from birth through age 21, communities across the state are now seeking more creative ways to enhance educational opportunities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for three- to five-year-olds.

To support these efforts, the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services, part of the Iowa Department of Education, designated three of its consultants—Dee Gethmann, Penny Milburn, and Mary Schertz—to gather a group of stakeholders (see Appendix A) to help refocus, refine, and elaborate its 1993 publication, *Iowa Procedures for the Provision of Early Childhood Special Education Programs and Services in the Least Restrictive Environment*.

This handbook is for you if you're committed to giving Iowa's preschoolers with disabilities the most appropriate educational opportunities the system can offer. Leaders are needed at every level; whatever your role, effective leadership starts with good information.

3–4–5 Thrive gives you quick access to the basics by answering this question: What does LRE mean when you're planning instructional services for preschool children with disabilities? You'll learn what the current law is, understand its intents, and have a start on implementation strategies.

There is no doubt you can help young children thrive. You have federal and state law to support you, best practices guidelines to show the way, and shared commitment to make it happen.

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Introduction

The subtitle of this guide includes the term *Least Restrictive Environment.* All who worked on this publication are taking a persuasive stance for inclusion, believing it expands the definition of LRE in meaningful ways.

LRE means more than just placing children with disabilities in settings with children without identified disabilities. It means incorporating into a whole and creating a harmonious environment. It means stretching limits. It means viewing all children first as children and then as children with individual needs. It means three- to five-year-olds with disabilities and those without are more alike than different from one another; they benefit from learning and playing together.

Children benefit from learning and playing together

Appendix B introduces you to some of the research supporting inclusion as an educationally appropriate choice, but you don't need studies to tell you it is morally appropriate. So begin with this premise:

LRE for most young children = General education environment

LRE has been a concept in Iowa special education law since 1974 and in federal law since PL-94-142 was enacted in 1975 to establish the following:

- *All children eligible for special education are entitled to a free appropriate public education and must be provided with an individualized education program (IEP) that is implemented in the least restrictive environment. The IEP team, which includes parents, must consider the child's individual needs in determining the environment(s) and services appropriate to support the achievement of identified educational goals.*

  It is the responsibility of the local education agency (LEA) or the area education agency (AEA) to offer the child a program appropriate to meet the goals and objectives delineated in the IEP. It is the role of the IEP team to determine services and environment(s) that are least restrictive.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97) was intended to strengthen the relationship between LRE and a child's

participation in the general education environment and to increase accountability for educational progress. You'll learn more about this legislation as you continue reading, but here's why it has such impact:

- IDEA 97 redefines policies and procedures for carrying out the IEP process for preschool children with disabilities.

- It makes inclusion the standard by setting the expectation that all children with disabilities, including preschoolers, will ***participate in*** and ***progress in*** the general education environment with their nondisabled peers.

Advocating for inclusion is always appropriate, but IDEA 97 makes it nearly inevitable within the IEP process. If you need to prepare for your role on the team by reviewing the process in its entirety, a copy of *Their Future...Our Guidance: Iowa IEP Guidebook*, published in April of 1998 by the Iowa Department of Education, is yours for the asking. **In this document, the focus is on IDEA 97's definition and implementation of LRE and what is needed to ensure that three- to five-year-olds with disabilities flourish in the general education environment.**

Four steps in the IEP process call for special attention if educational progress through inclusion is to be achieved:

- Developing sound IEPs
- Seeking appropriate learning environments
- Obtaining funding
- Ensuring implementation

These steps are addressed by section. Each section identifies what the law says, explains what the law intends, and highlights best practices key to your success.

PART I: Developing Sound IEPs

What the law says

IDEA 97's emphasis on helping children with disabilities progress in the general education environment is reinforced in CFR 300.347, which outlines requirements for assessing present levels of educational performance and writing measurable annual goals and benchmarks/ short-term objectives. The law adapts the requirements to apply specifically to three- to five-year-olds:

> *The IEP for each child with a disability must include—*
>
> *(1) A statement of the child's present levels of educational performance, including how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled children)...*[and] ***for preschool children**, as appropriate, **how the disability affects the child's participation in appropriate activities**.*
>
> *(2) A statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to meeting the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum, or **for preschool children**, as appropriate, **to participate in appropriate activities**, and* [to] *meeting each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability.* (Emphasis added.)

*IDEA 97 . . . **helping children with disabilities progress in the general education environment***

A preschool-age child's IEP team must include a parent or guardian, a special education teacher, a general education teacher (if the chld is or may be participating in the general education environment), an individual who can designate special education resources, and someone who can interpret evaluation results. The team is responsible for meeting the requirements of IDEA 97 as the IEP is being developed. A preschool teacher may join the team to assist in designing the IEP to reflect the interventions and supports needed to help the child progress in appropriate activities found in general education environments for three- to five-year-olds.

The preschool teacher is an individual who is qualified to serve nondisabled children of the same age as defined by the state standards

of the Iowa Department of Education, the Department of Human Services, or Head Start—including an LEA teacher of a public preschool program, a teacher of an early childhood program in the community, and/or a kindergarten teacher (for a kindergarten-aged child). In some special circumstances, a teacher may serve in dual roles as the special education teacher and regular education teacher if the individual holds the following endorsements and is currently teaching in the settings listed:

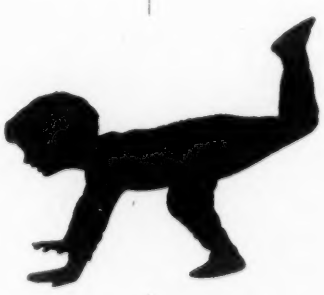
- both an early childhood and early childhood special education **or** unified early childhood endorsement
- LEA public preschool program, reverse integration program, kindergarten

The IEP document must specify a child's present levels of educational performance and set forth measurable annual goals and benchmarks/ short-term objectives. Further, it must describe how the IEP team will support and monitor the child's educational progress. The team must specify strategies for meeting the goals and benchmarks/objectives and assign responsibility for addressing them. Finally, the team must identify the modifications and supports needed by preschool teachers to enable them to implement the IEP in a general education environment.

What the law intends

The intent of IEP requirements has always been to ensure an educational program tailored to meet a child's specific needs in the least restrictive environment. Now the requirements call for thoughtful planning to enable all young children to progress toward their educational goals in the context of inclusion.

The law acknowledges the general education environment of three- to five-year-olds is different from that of older children by focusing on *appropriate activities* to describe the *general curriculum* more clearly. Appropriate activities are those that reflect achievement of developmental abilities (e.g., skipping) or milestones (e.g., combining three words to convey meaning) used to benchmark progress of typically developing children of the same age. Appropriate



activities are the practices, curriculum, and methodology utilized to support children's learning and development of abilities and milestones.

Knowledge of the full range of abilities and milestones for three-, four- and five-year-olds and of multiple evaluation techniques is essential to developing sound IEPs. The assessment process determines a child's present levels of educational performance and the areas of need arising from his/her disability that directly affect participation in appropriate activities within the general education environment.

Once the child's strengths and needs are known, the IEP team's next responsibility is to engage in dialogue about appropriate annual goals and the selection of intervention strategies. Program planning focuses on the child's characteristics and variables in the general education environment that can be modified to support achievement of IEP goals. Adaptations and modifications in the curriculum, instruction, and environment may need to be made to ensure success of the intervention. The team then needs to decide how to support the preschool teacher as s/he implements the IEP.

Appropriate activities are the practices, curriculum, and methodology

Accountability for seeing that every preschool child with disabilities has an IEP that meets the intent of the law is an integral part of IDEA 97 and is reinforced by Iowa rules and regulations. IEP team members can check their own performance by sharing answers to three questions:

1. Will the IEP ensure substantive progress in the child's ability to engage in activities that require educationally significant and age-relevant abilities/skills?

2. Does the IEP enable the child's meaningful participation with his/her nondisabled peers?

3. Have the right adaptations, modifications, and supports been provided to make implementation of the IEP a reasonable expectation?

What lawmakers, educators, consultants, and parents have learned from experience is this: if teams begin developing an IEP without a clear understanding of the implications of these questions, strategies tend to be more isolating than inclusive.

Best practices key to your success

The law supports better decision-making on behalf of young children, and you will make many of your most important decisions at the initial IEP meeting. Here are some guidelines:

- Check "The Initial IEP Meeting" chapter in *Their Future...Our Guidance* (referenced on page 6) as your first preparation step—even if you've read it before.
- See that the IEP team includes the people required by law and others who will improve decision-making for this particular child.
- Set inclusion as the context for planning.
- Take care that all team members are acquainted with the full range of developmental abilities and milestones appropriate for three-, four-, and five-year-olds.
- Provide information regarding the characteristics of a high-quality early childhood program.
- Have available all information relevant to the child's present levels of educational performance, making sure strengths are noted along with needs.
- Focus asessment data on characteristics of educational settings and the child's skills that can be changed.
- Concentrate on identifying ways in which this child is like other children of his/her age before the team determines special educational needs—the team needs to build a plan based on the full picture.
- Make it easy for all team members to share information and raise questions.
- Create clear links between the educational needs you are addressing and the measurable annual goals and benchmarks/short-term objectives you're writing to maximize the child's progress toward achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones.

Completing the present levels of performance (PLEP) section of the IEP must be a team task. You want to be very clear about the child's current skills and aware of how the child functions in familiar environments for young children (home, preschool child care, etc.). Data-based assessment, including anecdotal information from all those

who know and work with the child, will be essential. The team will need answers to questions like these:

- How does the child communicate with adults and peers?
- How well can s/he follow routines in multiple environments?
- At what level of development are his/her self-help, motor, language, and social skills?
- What strategies have helped the child learn acquired skills?

Developing annual goals and short-term objectives includes planning strategies for reaching them. As a team, you're looking for strategies that will work in a general education environment and maximize the child's progress toward achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones. Don't forget—the preschool teacher can be of real help in linking these strategies to the classroom and identifying the supports needed for the child's active participation. An early childhood special education professional and a preschool teacher working together with parents can be a powerful combination!

Maximize the child's progress toward achieving age-appropriate developmental milestones.

PART II: Seeking Appropriate Learning Environments

Each child's IEP forms the basis for decisions regarding the learning environment(s) that will accommodate the child's present levels of educational performance and enable achievement of annual goals and benchmarks/short-term objectives. These decisions must be determined according to each child's abilities and needs and not on factors such as the significance of the disability, availability of special education and support services, configuration of the service delivery system, availability of space, or convenience of administration.

What the law says

Legislatively, LRE is grounded in the assumption that the general education environment is appropriate for educating all children, including those whose special needs are being met through an IEP. This is how the general LRE requirements for preschoolers are defined in the Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education [281–41.37 (1) and (2)]:

Decisions must be determined according to each child's abilities and needs

- *...For preschool children who require special education, the general education environment is the environment where appropriate activities occur for children of similar age without disabilities. Each agency shall ensure and maintain adequate documentation that to the maximum extent appropriate, eligible individuals, including eligible individuals in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with individuals who are nondisabled. Special classes, separate schooling or other removal of eligible individuals from the general education environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.*

Under federal regulations, placement decisions are governed by CFR 300.552:

- *In determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability, each public agency shall ensure that the placement decision is made by a group of persons, including the parents, and other persons knowledgeable about the child, the meaning of the evaluation data,*

and the placement options and is made in conformity with the LRE provisions...

The child's placement is determined at least annually, is based on the child's IEP, and is as close as possible to the child's home. Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that he or she would attend if nondisabled.

In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services that he or she needs. A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum.

Determination of the LRE for a young child requiring special education is accomplished through identifying the child's present levels of educational performance and designing services in the general education or special education environments or both to support the child's educational needs. The IEP team must consider **all** options that would meet the needs of the child, not just options that are readily available in the school district.

Communities have resources to support families and educators in meeting the needs of young children with and without disabilities. In many instances, these resources either already are providing or can be adapted to provide an inclusive environment beneficial to all preschool-age children.

Appendix C is an easy-reference matrix of early childhood settings. The matrix describes settings in the continuum of LRE options as defined by federal requirements and Iowa rules. The codes (EC1, EC2, etc.) are used in the IEP to document LRE for three- to five-year-olds in place of percentages indicating degree of removal from the general education environment.

The matrix presents a broad range of possibilities, but it is only a starting place. The real challenge lies in creating an appropriate match between the child's unique needs and the environments in which s/he is to grow and develop.

What the law intends

The IEP team determines the appropriateness of providing special education services in an inclusive setting by taking into account the characteristics of the child and the environment, the curriculum, and the specially designed instruction needed to support the child. Appendix D offers one method to conduct a review of an early childhood setting. The information gathered from the review can assist the IEP team in determining appropriate interventions and specific supports that will meet the child's strengths and needs identified on the IEP.

Conduct a review of an early childhood setting

When determining the match, the IEP team considers how an early childhood setting designed primarily for children without disabilities can appropriately meet the individual educational needs of children with disabilities. Under Iowa's Administrative Rules of Special Education [41.67 (6)], the IEP team shall consider the following five questions regarding the provision of special education and related services:

1. What accommodations, modifications, and adaptations does the child require to be successful in a general education environment?
2. Why can't these accommodations, modifications, and adaptations be provided within the general education environment? (Virtually always the answer should be, "They can be provided.")
3. What supports are needed to assist the teacher and other personnel in providing these accommodations, modifications, and adaptations?
4. How will providing special education services and activities in the general education environment impact this child?
5. How will providing special education services and activities in the general education environment impact other children?

—about feasibility

Though the IEP team is allowed much flexibility in achieving successful placements in general education environments, the Iowa Department of Education does require that the AEA or LEA conduct a review of an early childhood setting to determine the feasibility of

providing special education instructional services in a general education environment. The process includes these steps:

- Confirmation that the setting is currently in compliance with the licensing standards or program regulations of the governing body (i.e., Department of Human Services (DHS), Department of Education, or Head Start)
- Assurance that the staff at the setting are willing to participate in the review and to work with the special education staff and family to provide an appropriate special education program
- Visitation of the facility by the family and consideration of their observations and input
- Survey of the facility and observation of the program (Appendix D)
- A dialogue with the staff

The child will be participating to the maximum extent appropriate with nondisabled children

Those responsible for determining LRE for a three- to five-year-old with a disability should assume that the child will benefit most from a carefully designed IEP implemented where s/he can be an integral part of a group of typically developing children close to his/her own age.

The IEP team is responsible for determining and justifying LRE placement, for making sure the environment is adapted to support the child's inclusion to the fullest extent possible, and for providing the special education instructional and support services the child requires to achieve the goals and objectives of his/her IEP.

Rules and regulations give the underpinnings of authority, but it is the IEP team's combination of caring and expertise that leads to considered, informed LRE decisions. The team's dialogue should include

- analyzing the observation reports
- considering the aspects of the setting that will address the child's present levels of educational performance and the measurable annual goals and benchmarks/short-term objectives
- exploring what's needed in supplementary aids and services for the child and in program modifications and supports for the staff so the child can be involved and progress in appropriate activities
- determining whether the setting provides a quality educational program that will meet the child's needs as identified in the IEP
- being sure the child will be participating to the maximum extent appropriate with nondisabled children in a general education environment

Best practices key to your success

Remember, the law requires the IEP team to obtain "appropriate" placement. There's little latitude in the term, meaning if there is a void that prevents meeting a child's needs in the least restrictive environment, that void must be filled.

Providing special education services in a general education environment is a complex process influenced by communities, school districts, families, and the children themselves. Every IEP team must consider all of the perspectives when developing strategies to support young children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Being a valuable team member requires you to have a strong knowledge base, an openness to others' questions and ideas, and a willingness to keep learning.

- You need to know the continuum of services and the placement alternatives available in your area.
- Knowing the options means more than knowing where the sites are and the names of their directors. You can take the lead in seeing to it that team members are familiar with the philosophies that guide instructional practices in local sites, the kinds of curricula in operation, the staffing levels, the advantages and disadvantages of the physical facilities, and the value placed on helping children with special needs succeed in an inclusive setting.
- When assessing a setting for an LRE selection, the IEP team is well advised to pay attention to these factors identified by the Early Childhood Research Institute on Inclusion (ECRII):
  - ➢ Is instruction modified so children with a range of abilities and needs can successfully participate?
  - ➢ Are the unique qualities of individual children highlighted, respected, and celebrated?
  - ➢ Is every child fully participating in the social and educational aspects of the classroom?
  - ➢ Is the space arranged to provide support for learning and peer interaction?
  - ➢ Are materials adapted to increase participation of all children?
  - ➢ Are routine activities divided into smaller parts to reduce the number of steps needed to accomplish a task?
  - ➢ Are materials and activities selected to reflect particular preferences and interests of individual children?

- ➢ Are adults and peers providing support through feedback, prompts, or hand-over-hand assistance?
- ➢ Is assistive equipment or technology provided to allow increased participation of all children?

- Become familiar with the survey presented as Appendix D; the survey gives detailed descriptions of a quality early childhood environment. The survey will help you get maximum benefits from site visits made to determine appropriateness.

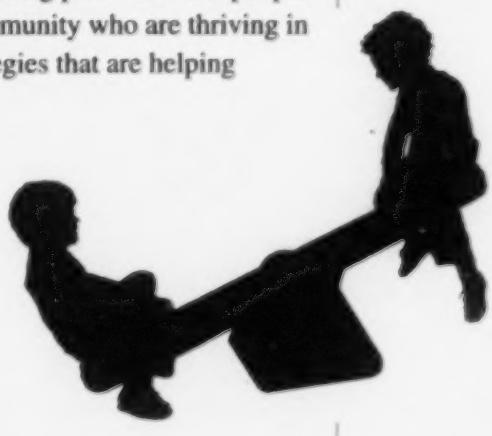
Gaining full benefit of existing options and creating new ones that can succeed are far more apt to happen in communities that understand and support inclusive educational environments for three- to five-year-olds. You can take the lead in building this vital foundation by doing the following:

- Learning all you can about inclusive alternatives, curriculum models, and setting options. Consultants in your AEA and the Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services are excellent resources. Appendix E gives you the addresses and telephone numbers of these and other resources.

- Building your own leadership skills. Appendix B suggests effective inclusion practices and outlines beliefs required for leaders to be true promoters of LRE.

- Speaking about the meaning and value of inclusion in forums like Rotary, PTA, school board, and parenting group meetings and creating/engaging in multiple opportunities for community members to ask questions and share information about related issues.

- Publicizing success stories and promising practices. Let people know about the children in your community who are thriving in inclusive settings and celebrate strategies that are helping children grow and develop.



PART III: Obtaining Funding

What the law says

Federal and state law requires that when special education and/or support services are provided in an early childhood setting as part of a *free and appropriate public education*, those services must be provided at no cost to the family. A combination of federal funds under IDEA 97, Part B, Section 619 (Preschool Grant) and state and local funds under 256B are used to pay for special education services.

In Iowa, federal funds are available to AEAs to provide support services. AEAs also have support dollars available through the state's school foundation aid plan to assist in providing those services. Weighted instructional dollars are generated by LEAs under the school foundation aid plan to provide instructional services.

Services must be provided at no cost to the family

The Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education in 41.84(9) set forth designated *levels of service* as the means of assigning appropriate special education weightings for funding instructional services:

- *The level of service refers to the relationship between the general education program and specially designed instruction for an eligible individual. The level of service is determined based on an eligible individual's educational need and independent of the environment in which the specially designed instruction is provided. One of three levels of service shall be assigned...*
  (a) Level I—...provides specially designed instruction for a limited portion or part of the educational program. A majority of the general education program is appropriate. ...includes modifications and adaptations to the general education program...
  (b) Level II—...provides specially designed instruction for a majority of the educational program. ...includes modifications, adaptations, and special education accommodations to the general education program.
  (c) Level III—provides specially designed instruction for most or all of the educational program. ...requires extensive redesign of curriculum and substantial modification of instructional techniques, strategies, and materials.

State weighted instructional dollars generated through the state foundation aid plan to fund inclusion in community early childhood settings are not always required. Depending on the child's needs, other funds from Head Start, at-risk, kindergarten, and Title I can be used alone or in combination with special education monies to support children in part-time early childhood–part-time early childhood special education settings.

—*about actual costs*

Iowa rules specify the following:

> *An AEA or LEA may make provisions for eligible individuals through contracts with public or private agencies that provide appropriate and approved special education. The program costs charged by or paid to a public or private agency for special education instructional programs shall be the* ***actual costs incurred*** *in providing that program.* [41.132(2)] (Emphasis added.)

Funding is to be based on individual needs as designated in the IEP

Actual costs to attend such settings may be paid with state weighted instructional dollars. Fee-based early childhood settings may include the following in their charges to the LEA or AEA:

- Tuition to provide appropriate services as described in the IEP (Rates may be adjusted to reflect actual costs.)
- Funding for substitutes or overtime to enable personnel to attend staffings and parent conferences
- Cost of staff development activities specific to the needs of three- to five-year-olds requiring special education, including funding for substitutes or overtime
- Transportation of the children to and from inclusive settings (If families are to be reimbursed for such transportation, they must be reimbursed for the actual cost.)
- Expenditures for assistive technology devices specified in the IEP
- Special education personnel to provide and monitor services as required by the IEP

Iowa rules emphasize that funding is to be based on individual needs as designated in the IEP:

- *Eligible individuals below the age of six may be designated as full-time or part-time students depending on the needs of the child. Funding shall be based on individual needs as determined by the IEP team. Special education instructional funds generated through the weighting plan can be used to pay tuition, transportation, and other necessary special education costs, but shall not be used to provide child care. (a) Full-time ECSE instructional programming shall include 20 hours or more instruction per week... (b) Part-time ECSE instructional programming shall include up to 20 hours of instruction per week.* [41.132(8)]

If an IEP requires a child to participate in both a general education and a special education environment on site, the total hours of instruction in both settings should be used to determine full-time/part-time status. Following the development of an IEP, the AEA director or designee assigns the appropriate weightings.

Total hours of instruction in both settings should be used to determine full-time/ part-time status

AEAs may assign weightings using one of two procedures: levels of service as described in 41.84(9) or a traditional weighting system based on program models also described in the Iowa rules. Always weightings are assigned on the basis of the frequency, intensity, and duration of services, not on the basis of educational setting.

The following weightings apply for funding IEPs of children receiving services at least 20 hours per week:

Supplemental assistance ..... .68
Full-time instructional services .. 2.35 or 3.52
(depending on child's needs)

The weightings are adjusted for funding IEPs of children receiving services less than 20 hours per week:

Supplemental assistance ..... .68
Part-time instructional services .. 1.68 or 2.26
(depending on child's needs)

Whether services are designated full-time or part-time, LEAs and AEAs may enter into contracts to fund the monitoring of IEPs in early childhood settings.

—about funding prohibitions

Child care

Iowa Rule 41.132(8) specifically prohibits the provision of child care as part of a child's free and appropriate public education. IEP teams will be responsible for differentiating between an IEP-driven early childhood special education service and child care. Parents or other agencies may choose to pay for attendance at an early childhood setting beyond those hours funded by the LEA or AEA as part of the child's IEP.

Religiously affiliated early childhood settings

Iowa rules also prohibit agencies from using public funds to finance special education in community-based early childhood programs located in private facilities unless the following conditions are met:

- The program maintains a nonsectarian board of directors.
- The program is incorporated separately from any religious institution.
- The program pays reasonable rent.
- No part of the program's curriculum is religious in nature.

Unilateral placements

Federal regulations under 300.403 state that an LEA does not have to pay the cost of education, including special education and related services, of a child with a disability at a private school or facility if the district made free and appropriate education available to the child and the parents instead elect to place the child in a private setting.

Parents or other agencies have the right, however, to arrange participation in a private school or facility without creating an affiliation with an AEA or LEA. If parents exercise this right, the child's IEP does not list participation in the setting as a placement or special education service. Transportation is not provided, and no special education funding is provided by the AEA or LEA. Technical assistance may be provided upon request at no cost to the entity or the parents.

—about contracts

Iowa law permits an LEA or AEA to contract with or make payments to other public or private schools and agencies approved by the AEA director of special education to provide special education services in the least restrictive enviornment to three- to five-year-old children with disabilities. Contractees must comply with the conditions and standards prescribed by the DHS and the Iowa Department of Education.

Contractees must comply with the conditions and standards

Here are the requirements for early childhood settings:

- The entity **must** be licensed by or registered with DHS.
- The entity **must** be determined to be an appropriate setting for delivering special education services on the basis of the review process outlined on page 13.
- The entity **must** employ as the child's teacher an individual holding one of the following licenses: unified early childhood, early childhood, elementary, or early childhood special education. (See Appendix F)
- The entity **must** make itself subject to audit to demonstrate that funds charged reflect actual costs of serving the child.
- The entity **must** enter into a contractual agreement to provide services.

Two types of contracts are required: agency-to-agency contracts and individual child contracts.

Agency-to-agency contracts

These contracts should include the following:

- Verification that the entity holds a DHS license.
- Verification that the entity has been reviewed and approved as a special education setting.
- Documentation of the commitments being made by all parties, including specific roles and responsibilities.
- Assurances that opportunities for parent involvement will be provided to these minimum standards:
  - —staffings and parent conferences and reports will be provided at least as often as they are provided to parents of children without disabilities
  - —parents will be welcome to visit, observe, and participate in affiliated parent groups

- A tuition agreement that outlines the rate for time enrolled, the actual costs of additional expenses, who will pay the tuition, the schedule of payment, and the frequency and duration of services.
- Assurance that policies and procedures for handling emergencies and other safety concerns are documented and known by the staff.
- A transportation plan.
- A plan for ensuring adequate personnel, including the hiring, training, and supervision of paraprofessionals.
- An agreement to document examination of program quality on a periodic basis.

Two sample agency-to-agency contracts are included as Appendix G.

Individual child contracts

IEP documents constitute individual child contracts

By law, IEP documents constitute individual child contracts. Precisely because IEPs are legal and binding contracts, they must delineate the roles of all staff and responsibilities of all agencies, include measurable annual goals and benchmarks/objectives carefully crafted to support a child in the LRE, and provide unambiguous answers to these questions:

1. What special accommodations and adaptations are required to serve this child?
2. What are the special health care needs?
3. What specific training is required related to the child's identified disability(ies)?
4. What is the estimated duration of service?
5. Within that time frame, how many hours will the child be in attendance? (Documentation should include dates and calendars.)
6. What supports, including paraprofessionals, will be required?
7. What, if any, are the transportation needs?
8. How will incremental progress toward IEP goals and benchmarks/objectives be evaluated?

What the law intends

Federal and state regulations are written to ensure that every three- to five-year-old child with a disability receives his/her franchise to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment as designated in the IEP. The regulations were never intended to create

barriers that limit opportunities for three- to five-year-olds with disabilities to be educated with their nondisabled peers.

As the table suggests, there are resources available to fund sound IEPs for these children:

Examples of Funding Uses and Sources		
Funds may be used to...	**Funds may come from...** (one or more sources)	
pay tuition to community preschool		LEA weighted instructional dollars
provide transportation to and from an instructional setting		LEA weighted instructional dollars
provide transportation to and from a support service	federal Part B funds, AEA support dollars	LEA weighted instructional dollars
provide assistive technology devices needed for a child to participate in special education	federal Part B funds, AEA support dollars	LEA weighted instructional dollars
pay for LRE facilitators or ECSE staff to monitor the IEP	federal Part B funds, AEA support dollars	LEA weighted instructional dollars
pay for support staff or itinerant teachers to monitor the IEP	federal Part B funds, AEA support dollars	
pay for staff development	federal Part B funds, AEA support dollars	LEA weighted instructional dollars
provide substitute teachers or reimburse teachers who need to attend IEP meetings		LEA weighted instructional dollars
pay a paraprofessional to assist a child in an instructional setting to support service		LEA weighted instructional dollars

Best practices key to your success

- Know the resources. The knowledge is important for anyone who is contributing to, making allocation decisions about, or using public education funds—a fairly inclusive list.
- Join others in learning more. AEA and LEA boards conduct public meetings regarding their annual budgets and financial statements. Questions are always invited and appreciated at these meetings. AEA and LEA business managers, directors of special education, and other knowledgeable administrators are excellent resources for community groups whenever they want information tailored to a specific context.
- Be active in your support of fair and adequate funding at local, state, and national levels for meeting the needs of preschoolers with disabilities.
- Make sure your IEP team includes one member who is well-versed in current special education funding rules and regulations.
- Study the sample agency-to-agency contracts included as Appendix G. Being familiar with their language will help you assess other contracts more effectively.
- Remember—the focus of funding, like that of placement, should be on providing each three- to five-year-old with a disability the most appropriate educational opportunities in an inclusive general education environment.
- Don't forget other sources that can help you meet young children's special needs. You've already been reminded of Head Start, at-risk, kindergarten, and Title I; Shared Visions, Empowerment Area grants, and Y programs are additional possibilities in many communities. Be informed and be creative!

Know the resources

PART IV: Ensuring Implementation

Implementation requires attention to multiple components for ensuring that a child's experience in an inclusive setting is successful: IEP monitoring, relationship-building, problem-solving, and staff support. Of the components identified here, the only one specifically prescribed in law is monitoring the IEP.

What the law says

The introduction of this handbook presents the IDEA 97 expectation that preschoolers with disabilities will **progress** in the general education environment. Section 300.350, dealing with accountability, states the responsibility straightforwardly:

> *Each public agency must make a good faith effort to assist the child to achieve the goals and objectives or benchmarks listed in the IEP.*

Monitoring is an integral part of the IEP process

Monitoring is an integral part of the IEP process. Every three- to five-year-old whose special education needs are being addressed through an IEP is entitled to regular assessment of progress toward stated goals and benchmarks/short-term objectives; hence, all monitoring provisions (personnel, schedule, specific responsibilities including data reporting) must be fully documented in the IEP.

To make sound data-based decisions, those providing direct services and monitoring the IEP **must** carry out these roles and responsibilities:

- participate in the ongoing implementation of the IEP
- observe the child and conduct assessments
- determine with the team how and when to make instructional decisions
- ensure that the annual goals and benchmarks/short-term objectives are being monitored on a regularly scheduled basis, e.g., weekly or bi-weekly
- keep all IEP team members informed of the child's performance and progress
- give progress reports to parents as frequently as reports are given to parents of nondisabled children

Iowa Rules identify professionals qualified to monitor the IEP and take into account who is implementing the IEP objectives.

- If participation in an early childhood setting is designated **a special education instructional service**, the IEP must be monitored by a licensed early childhood special education (ECSE) professional: an LRE facilitator, an ECSE teacher, an ECSE strategist, or an ECSE consultant. Even if the IEP team has agreed that strategies for achieving goals and objectives may be implemented in an inclusive setting by staff members who do not have an early childhood special education license or certificate, progress still must be monitored by a licensed professional designated in the IEP.
- For placements in an early childhood setting for **special education instructional and support service**, a support service professional (e.g., a speech–language pathologist) may have primary responsibility for ongoing intervention, consultation, and monitoring of the IEP. In such instances, a licensed ECSE professional must provide periodic monitoring of the instructional program itself.
- If a three- to five-year-old child in an early childhood setting requires **only support services,** the IEP is to be implemented and monitored by the appropriate support personnel. Even in this circumstance, those responsible for monitoring progress must be identified in the IEP document.

What the law intends

Make a good faith effort is a powerful invitation to interpretation of intent. Why is monitoring so important? It is the only way for an IEP team to ensure that the learning environment is being adapted to support the child's inclusion to the fullest extent possible and that the child is receiving the right special education instructional and/or support services to progress in the general education environment.

Remember, monitoring is a means—not an end. The intent of monitoring is to address a child's changing needs in an inclusive learning environment that is also changing.

It is the monitoring process that provides the IEP team the data to make changes in educational strategies, support services, and goals and objectives to ensure maximum gains. When they are driven by

performance data, these changes can have enormous positive impact on the progress of a preschool-age child with a disability.

Best practices key to your success

Though the law is specific only in terms of monitoring requirements, it provides generalizations concerning the importance of relationship-building, problem-solving, and staff support in ensuring a child's success in an inclusive program. Within the context established, the key for the IEP team is to attend to all three for the benefit of children.

Relationship-building

- Visit the setting before the child's program is initiated. Discuss curriculum strengths, professional skills, and facility advantages with the staff.
- Make sure everyone who will be working with the child knows his/her present levels of performance, needed accommodations, and goals and benchmarks/short-term objectives. A summary sheet may be helpful.
- Encourage frequent contacts by the staff. Give them your office phone number. Be responsive.
- Let the staff know when your scheduled visits will take place, and be sure to notify the staff if there is a change in your schedule.
- Attend staff meetings and group meetings, coffees, parties, etc. for parents and staff as appropriate.
- Make your visits positive ones. Comment on changes that have occurred. Build on strengths as you correct any problems.
- Support the family's involvement in activities.

Support the family's involvement in activities

Problem-solving

- Don't let problems fester. If you sense concerns, make sure they're aired and dealt with. If your observations or assessments indicate difficulties, share your findings immediately and in terms of what's happening for the child.
- Encourage collaboration.
- Make sure all relevant information is shared and staff members are involved in defining problems and generating alternative solutions.

- Call on personnel from your local AEA and/or the Iowa Department of Education as resources for finding workable solutions.
- Involve other IEP team members in generating strategies to put solutions to work.

Staff Support

- Promote open discussion of differing beliefs concerning the inclusion of children with disabilities in environments with nondisabled children and how those beliefs affect classroom practices.
- Identify training needs.
- Identify and facilitate ongoing staff development, e.g., provide specialized training in positioning, sign language, adaptive equipment use, positive behavioral supports, conflict resolution, curriculum modification, instructional strategies, data collection.
- Plan follow-up activities.
- Model demonstration teaching, peer coaching, mentoring, networking.
- Be a resource: share articles, materials, information, etc.
- Join the staff in planning activities.
- Make the staff integral members of the assessment team, e.g., show them how to record anecdotal data.
- Use a nondirective approach, e.g., asking for suggestions.
- Coordinate team-building.
- Assist with parent-family activities.

Conclusion

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This guide was written by advocates of inclusion for advocates of inclusion. If you've read this far, you know what the law says, you know what it intends, and you have a start on implementation strategies.

Designing IEPs to help preschoolers with disabilities thrive intellectually, physically, and socially with their nondisabled peers; ensuring their placement in nurturing general education environments managed by teachers who have the supports they need; obtaining funding and handling the paperwork involved; and facilitating efficient, productive implementation of the IEP are indeed challenging tasks.

Your success adds another step. Children who achieve preschool milestones will be ready to leave the supportive programs and nurturing environments you've created and find their way in new ones.

Going from preschool to elementary is momentous for young children with disabilities. The Iowa Department of Education's publication, *Taking the Next Steps Together*, can help smooth the transition. We know you'll use your experience and your commitment to help others shape new environments that foster continuing growth and development.

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Appendix A
Acknowledgment

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Thrive
Appendix B
Research

Supporting inclusion*

The term *inclusion* began appearing in the early 1990s (Stainback & Stainback, 1990) in part as a reaction to the way in which mainstreaming was being poorly implemented in some public school settings for elementary school-aged children, and the term was rapidly applied to early childhood programs. The definition implied a more embedded (in general education) and comprehensive (e.g., community as well as school settings) form of involvement of children with and without disabilities than occurred in mainstreamed programs. When authors currently write about inclusion at the early childhood level, they tend to define *inclusion* in different ways. . . The single commonality across definitions is that children with and without disabilities are placed in the same setting, which is most often a classroom (Odom & Diamond, 1998).

Children with and without disabilities are placed in the same setting

Specific contexts vary in different settings and/or organizations; the ratio of children with and without disabilities also varies. The term *inclusion*, however, is used most often when programs serve a majority of children who are typically developing; other descriptors are more often used when the majority of children served have disabilities (Odom & Diamond, 1998).

The rationale most often used to advocate for inclusive programs is threefold: philosophical, legal, and educational. The philosophical viewpoint suggests that placing children with disabilities in inclusive settings provides the children the opportunity to have as normal a life as possible (Bricker, 1978; Bailey, McWilliam, Buysse, & Wesley, 1998; Odom & Diamond, 1998). The legal viewpoint is based on IDEA and ADA, which support the right of children who receive special education services to be placed in classes with children who are typically developing. The educational viewpoint embraces the notion that children with disabilities are placed in inclusive settings because professionals and family members believe the children will experience greater developmental benefits in those settings than in segregated settings (Odom & Diamond, 1998).

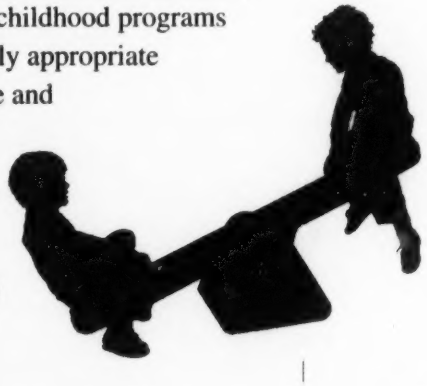
Inclusion occurs frequently, although the exact number of children served in inclusive settings is not known and estimates vary widely. In a national survey, early childhood educators reported that children with disabilities have been included in a variety of settings such as Head Start (94% of respondents), public school prekindergarten (73%

of respondents), kindergarten programs (81.5% of respondents), and community-based preschools (59.2% of respondents). Of the AEYC accredited preschools reporting, 56% enrolled children with disabilities (McDonnel, Brownell & Wolery, 1997).

Children who enroll in inclusive settings generally have mild or moderate disabilities (Buysse, Bailey, Smith, & Simeonsson, 1994; Barnett & Frede, 1993). The movement to place children with severe disabilities in more segregated settings appears to be influenced by teachers' reservations (Buysse, Wesley, Keyes, & Bailey, 1996), teachers' perceptions about their competence to provide appropriate services (Gemmel-Crosby & Hanzlik, 1994), and teachers' concerns about specific child behaviors (Barnett & Frede, 1993).

Research findings generally suggest that children with disabilities make greater developmental gains when enrolled in inclusive settings than in segregated settings (Buysse & Bailey, 1993). One study revealed that relatively higher functioning children with disabilities enrolled in inclusive classrooms experienced developmental gains that significantly exceeded the rate of normal development (Cole, Mills, Dale, & Jenkins, 1991). Findings for children with severe disabilities are more mixed. Some studies have shown that these children made greater gains when enrolled in segregated or mainstreamed early childhood special education classrooms (Cole, Mills, Dale, & Jenkins, 1991) while other studies have found that children with severe disabilities made greater gains when enrolled in inclusive rather than segregated programs (Hundert, Mahone, Mundy, & Vernon, 1998).

Curriculum offered in a program appears to be an important factor affecting children's developmental progress and must be considered in relationship to placement. NAEYC has proposed developmentally appropriate curriculum guidelines for all early childhood programs (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Developmentally appropriate practices have been evidenced in both inclusive and segregated early childhood classrooms (LaParo, Sexton, & Snyder, 1998). It appears, however, that variables often associated with inclusive settings have more positive effects on the developmental progress of children with disabilities, and several dimensions warrant consideration.



For one study, 153 children with disabilities who were enrolled in community-based classrooms where teachers offered choice of activities were observed and found to engage in high levels of peer interaction and to persist in attempting to master tasks (Hauser-Cram, Bronson, & Upsur, 1993). Mixed age groupings have been associated with greater participation in and length of conversations (Roberts, Burchinal, & Bailey, 1994); enhanced developmental trajectories for communication, motor, and cognitive development (Bailey, Burchinal, & McWilliam, 1993); higher interactions with peers for younger children (Bailey, McWilliam, Ware, & Burchinal, 1993); and greater levels of play mastery (Blasco, Bailey, & Burchinal, 1993). Research evidence continues to show that children with disabilities engage in more social interactions in inclusive settings than in segregated settings (Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1996).

Findings regarding family members' perceptions of inclusive settings for their young children with disabilities revealed positive feelings about inclusive settings and identified some benefits despite concerns about inclusive placements (Winton, 1993). A survey revealed that parents of children both with and without disabilities had more favorable attitudes toward their children's program when they were enrolled in inclusive rather than segregated settings (Miller, Strain, Boyd, Hunsicker, McKinley, & Wu, 1992). A more recent survey showed parents' increased satisfaction with inclusive settings when their children had been enrolled for longer periods of time (McWilliam, Lang, Vandeviere, Angell, Collins, & Underdown, 1995).

*The research citings in support of inclusion are from the following sources:

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Identifying leadership qualities*

Administrators can promote high quality and effective inclusive practices in their school districts:

- Professional commitment at all levels to inclusion.
- Planned, frequent, and carefully promoted social and educational interactions between children with and without disabilities by teachers.
- Comprehensive, state-of-the art educational procedures that include intensive parent involvement, intentional methods of instruction, repeated outcome assessment, and well-defined curriculum content.
- Blended, side-by-side and otherwise integrated services, staff, classrooms, and instructional practices between general and special education.
- Adequate supports for teachers and an ongoing commitment to professional development in effective practices.
- Provisions for overall program evaluation that include the opinions of consumers.

**The identified leadership qualities are adapted from varied sources.*

These beliefs are required for leaders to promote LRE:

Related to children

- All children can learn.
- All children deserve the opportunity to be educated with other children their own age.
- All children can participate in inclusive early childhood programs if given appropriate supports.

Related to staff roles

- We are good teachers, therapists, administrators, consultants, and we can be better if we change to use best practices and all work toward a common purpose or vision.
- We are all experts in our fields, but none of us is an expert in integrated practices.
- For each child in an LRE setting to receive a quality education, we will each need to make an individual as well as a group commitment to work together as a team.

An important study reported that inclusive programs that survived over time were those in which collaborative planning and decision-making occurred:

- Administration is sympathetic toward and supportive of inclusion.
- Administration includes direct service personnel in the decision-making process.
- Administrative and direct service personnel work together.
- Administration supports required modification such as release time for staff training.

**The identified leadership qualities are adapted from varied sources.*

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Appendix C
ECSE Setting Codes

This matrix describes settings in the continuum of LRE options defined by federal requirements and Iowa rules. The first column lists IMS codes required in IEP documents.

IMS code	*Setting*	*Federal terminology and definition*	*Iowa settings per category (examples)*	*Further clarification for LRE considerations*
EC1	Early childhood	Early childhood—unduplicated total who receive all of their special education and related services in educational programs designed primarily for children without disabilities	Public preschool	A preschool for children who are not age-eligible for kindergarten sponsored by the public schools. The category may include Title I, at-risk, and empowerment area school-ready programs.
			Private preschool or child care	A preschool or child care setting in the community that charges tuition to provide services.
			Head Start	A federally funded preschool for children meeting requirements of Head Start.
			Kindergarten	A publicly funded school classroom for children age five by September 1. Children who are five on December 1 count are included.
			Blended or team teaching inclusion program	A preschool designed for children without disabilities. Children with and without disabilities participate. EC and ECSE teachers team-teach the class.
			Combination setting	Children receiving special education in a home–EC combination or a home–Head Start combination.
EC2	Early childhood special education	Early childhood special education—unduplicated total who receive all of their special education and related services in educational programs designed primarily for children with disabilities housed in regular school buildings or other community based settings	Early childhood special education	Children receiving their special education in a setting designed for up to eight children with disabilities and taught by an ECSE teacher. The setting may be in a school building or other community based location.
EC3	Home	Home—unduplicated total who receive all of their special education and related services in the principal residence of the child's family or caregiver	Home intervention	Preschool age children (three-five) receiving their special education at home.

IMS code	*Setting*	*Federal terminology and definition*	*Iowa settings per category (examples)*	*Further clarification for LRE considerations*
EC4	Part-time early childhood and/or part-time ECSE	Part-time early childhood and/or part-time ECSE—unduplicated total who receive services **in multiple settings** such that (1) a portion of their special education and related services is provided at home or in educational programs designed primarily for children without disabilities and (2) the remainder of their special education and related services is provided in programs designed primarily for children with disabilities	Co-location program	A preschool such as Head Start, Title I, or a private school located in close proximity to an ECSE classroom. Children participate with nondisabled peers at least two times per week **or** a total of at least 120 minutes per week. The IEP is implemented and monitored in both settings.
			Dual program	Children participating in a pre-school such as Head Start, Title 1, or a private preschool enrolling children with disabilities and also participating in an ECSE classroom. Children participate with nondisabled peers at least two times per week **or** a total of at least 120 minutes per week. The IEP is implemented and monitored in both settings.
			Dual program in kindergarten	Children participating in kindergarten at least two times per week **or** a total of at least 120 minutes per week. The IEP is implemented and monitored in both the ECSE and kindergarten settings. Children who are age five on the December 1 count are included.
			Combination setting	Children receiving special education in a separate school or residential program and services in an EC setting. Children participate with nondisabled peers at least two times per week or a total of at least 120 minutes per week. The IEP is implemented and monitored in both settings.
			Kindergarten	Regular kindergarten with special education provided outside the regular class. Children who are five on the December 1 count are included.
			ECSE and home	Children participating in an ECSE classroom and receiving special education services at home. (The federal examples include this scenario assuming the home is designed for children without disabilities.)

IMS code	*Setting*	*Federal terminology and definition*	*Iowa settings per category (examples)*	*Further clarification for LRE considerations*
EC5	Reverse integration	Reverse integration—unduplicated total who receive all their special education and related services in educational programs designed primarily for children with disabilities but include 50% or more children without disabilities	Reverse integration	A classroom designed primarily for children with disabilities and taught by an ECSE teacher. **At least half of the children participating are not disabled.**
EC6	Residential facility	Residential facility—unduplicated total who receive all their special education and related services in publicly or privately operated **residential schools or residential medical facilities on an inpatient basis**	Residential facility	Children receiving all their special education in a publicly or privately operated **residential school or residential medical facility on an inpatient basis.**
EC7	Separate school	Separate school—unduplicated total who receive all their special education and related services in public or private day schools specifically for children with disabilities	Separate school	Children receiving all their special education in public or private day schools specifically for children with disabilities.
EC8	Itinerant services outside the home	Itinerant services—unduplicated total who receive all their special education and related services at a school/ hospital facility on an outpatient basis or at another location for a short period of time (no more than three hours per week) (These services may be provided individually or to a small group of children. The services may include, but are not limited to, speech, OT, and PT instruction up to three hours per week in a school, hospital or other com-munity based setting. This category does not include children receiving itinerant services at home.)	Itinerant services **outside the home**	Children receiving all their special education services at school, hospital outpatient, or other location. These services may include speech, OT, PT, or other support services such as itinerant hearing or vision, etc., for **no more than three hours per week.**

NOTE—In some instances children who are age five on December 1 count will be in kindergarten or elementary settings. A child in an instructional setting taught by a special education teacher rather than an ECSE teacher should be classified using the EC codes included here."Taught by an ECSE teacher" may then mean the same as "taught by a special education teacher."

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Thrive
Appendix D
Appropriate Setting Survey

Determining the Appropriateness of Offering ECSE Services in a General Education Environment

Setting— Director—	Child— Birth date—
Address—	Observer(s)—
Phone—	Observation date—
LEA—	AEA—

This form is to help you evaluate an early childhood environment to determine the appropriateness of implementing within it an IEP for a preschool child.

Rate each item listed next to a box using these symbols:

+ The criterion is **fully met**. You observe a great deal of evidence that the statement is an accurate description most of the time.

± The criterion is **partially met**. You observe some evidence that the statement is an accurate description some of the time.

- The criterion is **not met**. You observe little evidence that the statement is an accurate description any of the time.

Characteristics of a Quality Environment*

☐ An adequate and varied array of age-appropriate **materials** is available.

Descriptors

- Materials can serve a range of developmental-ability levels.
- There are small-sized tables and chairs in work and play areas.
- Materials are colorful, visually interesting.
- There are stimulating, age-appropriate pictures on the walls.
- Shelves and other furniture are arranged to encourage both independence and social play.
- Materials reflect diversity (i.e., ethnic, cultural, ability, age).

*Many of the characteristics and accompanying descriptors are drawn from *Accreditation Criteria and Procedures of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs* (NAEYC at 1834 Connecticut Ave. in Washington, DC 20009) and reflect effective practices.

☐ **Space** is used to enhance functionality.

Observation Notes

Descriptors
- There are areas for display of children's work.
- Areas are arranged for both individual and group activities (e.g., drawing, reading, pretending).
- Materials are positioned and organized so children can see and access them.
- There are posted physical cues to encourage children's independence (e.g., pictures of children on lockers, pictures of materials on corresponding shelves).
- Boundaries are defined (e.g., by tape, rugs, shelves) and can be rearranged to meet changing needs of learning activities.
- There is storage space (e.g., cubbies) for children's items.

☐ The environment is **safe**.

Descriptors
- Areas are accessible for children needing assistive devices.
- There are children's restrooms.
- The sinks are low—no need for step stools.
- Lighting is good.
- Ventilation and temperature control are adequate.
- All spaces are clean.
- Space is adequate for materials and activities.
- There's a mixture of floor coverings (e.g., tile for food areas, carpet for large group activities).
- Cleaning supplies are stored out of children's reach.
- First-aid equipment is readily accessible.
- There's padding where necessary.
- There's a separate area for food preparation.
- Space allows for children to move about freely.

☐ There are clearly defined **learning centers**.

Descriptors
- The centers invite hands-on interaction.
- The centers give children opportunities to use problem-solving skills.
- The centers promote fine motor, gross motor, cognition, social interaction, play, communication, literacy, and sensory integration skills (e.g., through Legos, blocks, puzzles, art materials, writing materials, trikes, balls, climbers, books, games, dramatic play materials).

(Continued)

Observation Notes

- The centers have materials that encourage open-ended creativity.
- There's a plan for frequent rotation of toys and materials in the centers.
- There's an outdoor center that's attractive, safe, and developmentally stimulating.
- Multi-sensory materials (e.g., music, videos) enhance center activities.
- The centers can be adapted for individual children.
- The centers promote sharing.

☐ There's a well-rounded assortment of **activities**.

Descriptors

- Children use a variety of materials.
- Children are playing together.
- Children are talking together—planning, solving problems, conversing.
- Time is structured for problem-solving between children with teacher support.
- Children may choose types and levels of play.
- Activities are sensory-based (e.g., seeable, touchable).
- Individual adaptations are planned.
- Flexibility is valued.
- Materials are arranged to promote interaction among children.
- Activities vary in duration and complexity.
- Activities are linked to incorporate content-area skills and knowledge (e.g., cooking experience—math concepts, cause-effect, language use, cultural awareness, cooperation).
- Activity goals are clear.
- Social interaction is one of the primary goals of the activities.
- Activities represent a wide range of cultural and individual differences, illustrating the similarities among all children.
- There's a general feeling of respect and celebration of differences and a feeling of group cohesiveness during the activities.

☐ The **teachers** encourage children to think, reason, question, and experiment.

Descriptors

- The curriculum adheres to the stages of learning: acquisition, practice, generalization, and maintenance or awareness, exploration, inquiry, and utilization.

✍ Observation Notes

- Teacher-directed/facilitated instructional strategies are based on the needs of each child.
- There are child-directed activities.
- Teachers move among children during child-directed experiences to facilitate learning.
- Teacher interventions include developing play situations that promote cooperation, facilitating interactions through mediation of conflict and interpretation of language and behavior.
- Teachers plan transitions from one activity to another.
- Teachers break a skill into smaller, more attainable steps.
- Teachers plan alternative, back-up activities.
- Teachers encourage children to help one another (e.g., holding hands, giving simple directions, reinforcing).
- Teachers observe and then document developmental information.
- Teachers set goals for children, using their own observations and information from others such as parents.
- Teachers exhibit these behaviors: asking questions, redirecting children who are having difficulties getting along, offering suggestions for extended involvement, promoting problem-solving, encouraging self-direction.
- Teachers are knowledgeable of the processes and stages of typical growth and development.
- Teachers are able to draw from community resources.
- Teachers do not overprotect children with disabilities or perceive them as incompetent.
- Teachers discuss differences of children in an open, honest, sensitive, and caring way.

☐ Interaction is the foundation of **communication**.

Descriptors

When communicating with children, the staff

- uses a variety of strategies to encourage the learning process.
- models good language.
- helps children become problem-solvers.
- allows children to make choices.
- compliments, praises, redirects, and shares positive ways of dealing with issues.
- offers options/choices.

Observation Notes

When communicating with parents, the staff

- listens and responds to concerns in a timely manner.
- uses multiple means of communication (e.g., conferences, letters, calls).
- uses family-friendly language.
- is proactive.
- invites parent participation in program decision-making.
- is willing to make changes.
- is open and welcoming to parents.

When communicating with other professionals, the staff

- shares responsibilities.
- promotes team-building.
- schedules meeting times for charting, problem-solving, training.
- is open in both oral and written comments.
- makes decisions based on data, observations of child's skill development, and parent reports.
- engages in ongoing training.
- focuses on children's needs.

Match of Setting with the Child's IEP

As you're evaluating the appropriateness of the setting for a particular child, you'll have before you his/her IEP delineating unique needs in one or more of the following goal areas: communication, self-help, behavior, social, motor, cognitive. Use this chart to indicate the match of the setting with the child's IEP goals:

Unique Needs	**What the Setting Provides**	**Needed Accommodations and Supports** (in setting/for staff)

Overall Comments about Appropriateness of the Environment

No form can take the place of a skilled observer's reactions. Use the space below to jot any explanatory remarks you want to make about the characteristics, descriptors, and ratings of the environment and the match with the child's unique needs delineated in his/her IEP.

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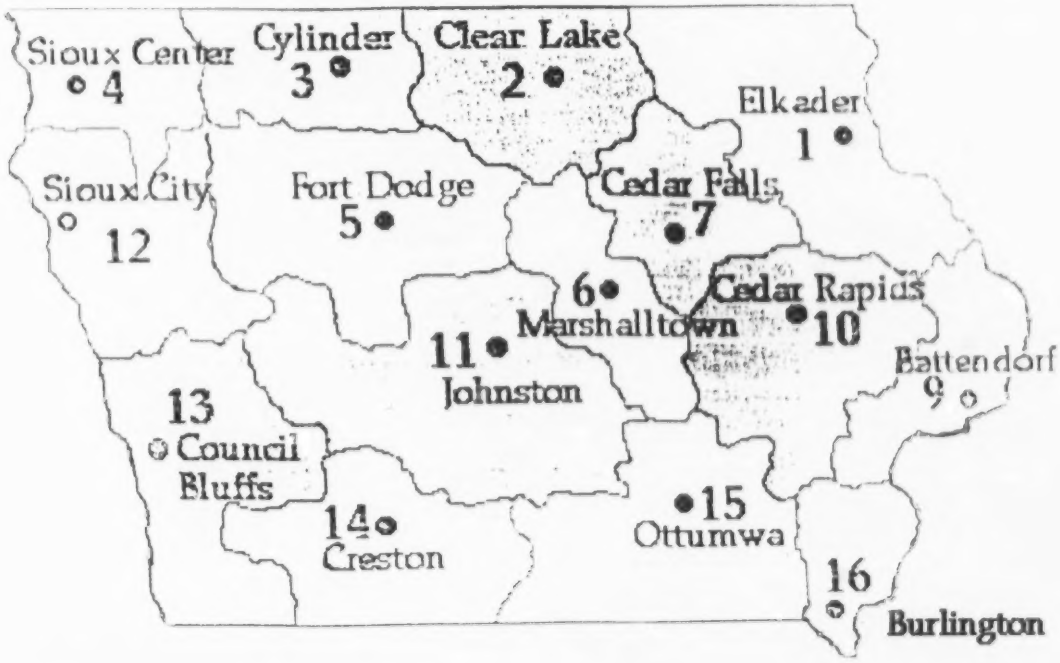
Thrive
Appendix E
State Resources

Area Education Agencies (AEAs)

There are fifteen area education agencies in Iowa. Each agency serves a specific region of the state and employs professional staff to provide ECSE and EC services.



AEA 1—Keystone
1400 2nd St. NW
Elkader, IA 52043
(319) 245-1480
1-800-632-5918

AEA 2—Northern Trails
PO Box M
Clear Lake, IA 50428-0613
(515) 357-6125
1-800-392-6640

AEA 3—Lakeland
PO Box 38
Cylinder, IA 50528-0038
(712) 424-3720
1-800-242-5100

AEA 4
1382 4th Ave. NE
Sioux Center, IA 51250-2131
(712) 722-4374
1-800-572-5073

AEA 5—Arrowhead
1235 5th Ave. S
PO Box 1399
Fort Dodge, IA 50501
(515) 574-5400

AEA 6
909 S 12th St.
Marshalltown, IA 50158
(515) 753-3564

(Continued)

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AEA 7
3706 Cedar Heights Dr.
Cedar Falls, IA 50613-6207
(319) 273-8250

AEA 9—Mississippi Bend
729 21st St.
Bettendorf, IA 52722-5096
(319) 359-1371

AEA 10—Grant Wood
4401 6th St. SW
Cedar Rapids, IA 52404-4499
(319) 399-6700
1-800-332-8488

AEA 11—Heartland
6500 Corporate Dr.
Johnston, IA 50131-1603
(515) 270-9030
1-800-362-2720

AEA 12—Western Hills
1520 Morningside Ave.
Sioux City, IA 51106
(712) 274-6000
1-800-352-9040

AEA 13—Loess Hills
Hwy. 92 E
PO Box 1109
Council Bluffs, IA 51502-1109
(712) 366-0503
1-800-432-5804

AEA 14—Green Valley
1405 N Lincoln
Creston, IA 50801
(515) 782-8443
1-800-362-1864

AEA 15—Southern Prairie
2814 North Court St.
Ottumwa, IA 52501-1194
(515) 682-8591
1-800-622-0027

AEA 16—Great River
1200 University Ave.
PO Box 1065
Burlington, IA 52601
(319) 753-6561
1-800-382-8970

State Departments

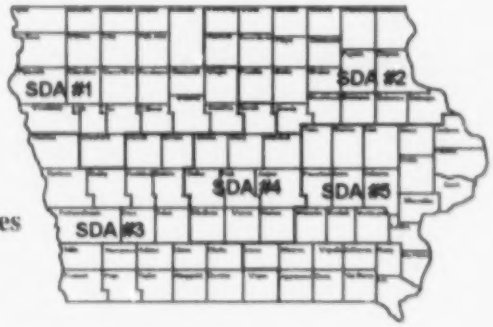
There are two state departments directly related to the purpose of this booklet. The divisions key to providing services for Iowa's preschoolers are listed.

Iowa Department of Education
Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319
(515) 281-3176

Iowa Department of Human Services
Commission on Children, Youth and Families
Hoover State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319
(515) 281-3974

Child Care Resource and Referral Centers (CCR&Rs)

There are five lead child care resource and referral centers organized into service delivery areas of the state. The centers provide training to child care providers and assist families in finding child care. You may be referred to a satellite office closer to you.



SDA 1—Day Care Resource and Referral Center
Mid-Sioux Opportunity, Inc.
418 Marion St.
Remsen, IA 51050
(712) 786-2001
1-800-859-2025

SDA 2—Child Care Coordination and Referral Services
Exceptional Persons, Inc.
760 Ainsborough Ave., PO Box 4090
Waterloo, IA 50704
(319) 233-0804
1-800-475-0804

SDA 3—Child Care Resource and Referral
West Central Development Corporation
611 Court St., PO Box 709
Harlan, IA 51537
(712) 755-7381
1-800-945-9788

SDA 4—Child Care Resource and Referral of Central Iowa
Polk County Child Care Resource and Referral Center
City View Plaza, Suite H
1200 University
Des Moines, IA 50314
(515) 286-3536
1-800-722-7619

SDA 5—Community Child Care Resource and Referral
Iowa East Central T.R.A.I.N.
2804 Eastern Ave.
Davenport, IA 52803
(319) 324-1302
1-800-369-3778

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Head Start Program

There are eighteen regional Head Start projects providing development programs for economically disadvantaged children. In addition to other services, Head Start's trained personnel offer programming for young children with disabilities.

1. **Mid-Sioux Opportunity, Inc.**
   418 Marion
   Remsen, IA 50150
   (712) 786-2001
   FAX—(712) 786-3250

2. **Upper Des Moines Opportunities, Inc.**
   101 Robins Ave., Box 519
   Graettinger, IA 51342
   (712) 859-3885
   FAX—(712) 859-3892

3. **North Iowa Comm. Act. Org.**
   300 15th St. NE, Box 1627
   Mason City, IA 50401
   (515) 423-5406
   FAX—(515) 423-0994

4. **Northeast Iowa Comm. Act. Corp.**
   Box 487
   Decorah, IA 52101
   (319) 382-8436
   FAX—(319) 382-9854

5. **Woodbury County Comm. Act. Agency**
   2700 Leech Ave.
   Sioux City, IA 51106
   (712) 274-1610
   FAX—(712) 274-0368

6. **Community Opportunities, Inc.**
   603 West 8th St.
   Carroll, IA 51401
   (712) 792-9268
   FAX—(712) 792-5723

7. **Your Own United Resources, Inc.**
   3611 Maple Drive
   Fort Dodge, IA 50501
   (515) 573-2882
   FAX—(515) 955-6994,

8. **Tri-County Head Start**
   Box 3338
   Evansdale, IA 50707
   (319) 235-0383, Ext. 4
   FAX—(319) 235-0384

9. **Operation New View Head Start**
   1473 Central
   Dubuque, IA 52001
   (319) 556-5130
   FAX—(319) 556-4402

10. **West Central Development Corp.**
    204 Oak St., Box 128
    Moorhead, IA 51558
    (712) 886-5218
    FAX—(712) 886-5460

11. **Drake University Head Start**
    3206 University
    Des Moines, IA 50311
    (515) 271-1854
    FAX—(515) 271-2199

12. **Mid-Iowa Comm. Act., Inc.**
    1001 South 18th Ave.
    Marshalltown, IA 50158
    (515) 752-7162
    FAX—(515) 752-9724

(Continued)

Head Start

13. Hawkeye Area Comm. Act. Prog., Inc.
5560 6th St. SW, Box 789
Cedar Rapids, IA 52406
(319) 366-7631
FAX—(319) 366-0776

14. IA East Central Train
2804 Eastern Ave.
Davenport, IA 52803
(319) 324-3236
FAX—(319) 324-9552

15. Matura Action Corporation
203 West Adams St.
Creston, IA 50801
(515) 782-8431
FAX—(515) 782-6287

16. South Central Iowa Comm. Act. Agency
1403 NW Church
Leon, IA 50144
(515) 446-4155
FAX—(515) 446-3392

17. Southern Iowa Economic Dev. Assoc.
226 West Main, Box 658
Ottumwa, IA 52501
(515) 682-8741
FAX—(515) 682-2026

18. Southeast Iowa Comm. Act. Agency
2850 Mt. Pleasant St., #108
Burlington, IA 52601-2001
(319) 752-2719
FAX—(319) 753-0687

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Thrive
Appendix F
Teacher License Requirement

Teacher Licensing Requirement

In the rare circumstance that no local community early childhood setting employs an individual holding an early childhood, unified early childhood, early childhood special education, or elementary teaching license, a contract **may be** developed if the following conditions are met:

- a **quality** early childhood program is available
- the entity is licensed by or registered with DHS
- the IEP team has determined the setting is appropriate for providing special education services
- the entity will make itself subject to audit to demonstrate that funds charged reflect actual costs of serving the child
- the entity will enter into a contractual agreement to provide services

To request contract development, the LEA principal **must** write a letter to an ECSE consultant at the Department of Education, Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services describing the situation and the accommodations and supports that will be provided to ensure an appropriate special education program for the child. The letter must be submitted prior to the implementation of the child's IEP. The Department will track the information and use the data to address staff development issues for early childhood. See a sample letter on the next page.

Sample Letter

ECSE Consultant
Iowa Department of Education
Bureau of Children, Family and Community Services
Grimes State Office Building
Des Moines, IA 50319

I am writing to request a waiver from the program requirements for serving children with disabilities in an early childhood setting. This waiver applies ONLY to the teacher licensure requirement.

An IEP meeting has been held for a young child in this district, and the team judgment is that the child's goals can be met best in an early childhood setting designed for children without disabilities. The community's Busy Bee preschool meets all but one criterion for appropriateness outlined in the *3-4-5 Thrive* document: the teacher, Sue Smith, does not hold the required Iowa teaching license.

Sue does have ten years' experience with preschool children and is willing to work with and learn from Jane Jones, AEA 8 ECSE Consultant, who will be the ECSE teacher of record. Jane will be in Busy Bee a minimum of two hours per week, team teaching with Sue, doing demonstration teaching, and monitoring the IEP. Jane will also meet at least monthly with Sue and other Busy Bee personnel to provide ongoing staff development.

Be assured that the team will review the Busy Bee program at subsequent IEP meetings to ensure it continues to be an appropriate setting for the delivery of ECSE Services. Thank you for considering the requested waiver.

Sincerely,

Joseph Johnson, Principal
First Elementary School
Anytown, IA 00000

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Thrive
Appendix G
Agency-to-Agency Contracts

The sample agency-to-agency contracts included for your review are only two of many versions you'll encounter. Remember this: however the versions vary, they must meet the requirements set forth in Part III of this handbook.

Sample 1

Early Childhood Placement Agreement

The Department of Education allows placement of a three- to five-year-old in an early childhood program for nondisabled children when the young child has an identified disability monitored by a special education IEP team member.

Approval and payment for the child's placement in this program option will require an IEP recommendation by the child's IEP team and written contract with the early childhood (EC) program assuring the following:

The IEP team agrees that (child's name) _____'s education needs can be appropriately provided in this early childhood setting.

(Name) _____will be assigned to be directly responsible for monitoring the child's progress toward annual goals and benchmarks/objectives.

The EC teacher will be (name) _____.

Review of the EC setting was completed on (date) _____ by (name) _____.

DHS licensed this center on (date) _____.

Prior to approving placement of a three- to five-year-old with a disability in an EC program, an agreement between the district and the EC setting shall be in existence and shall specify the following:

1. The IEP team, including the EC director, LEA administrator, ECSE teacher, and others, must agree before a placement is initiated.

2. The EC program agrees to consultation and demonstration on a regular basis (frequency will vary with needs from daily to at least every two weeks). The schedule for consultation is (specify) _____
_____
_____

   School calendar exceptions are (specify) _____
_____
_____

(Continued)

Early Childhood Placement Agreement (Continued)

3. Withdrawal from the program may be exercised at any time with or without advance notice by the Director of Special Education or designee if concerns arise regarding the philosophy, delivery, voided contractual agreements, health or safety, parental rights, progress toward IEP goals, or any other related factors that make continuing in the program inappropriate for the child.

4. With local school district administration approval, weighted special education funds may be used to pay for (include amounts)*
   a) Tuition _____
   b) Transportation _____
   c) Assistive technology _____
   d) IEP paraprofessional _____
   e) Staff development _____
   f) Other (specify) _____

Amount due per week _____

Billing procedures (specify) _____

Start date _____

Any changes to these costs must have prior approval.

_____ _____
LEA Administrator Date

_____ _____
AEA Director Date

_____ _____
EC Director Date

Sample 2

AGREEMENT

THIS AGREEMENT is made and entered into by and between _____, referred to as **Sending Agency**, and _____, referred to as **Receiving Agency**.

The parties agree as follows:

1. Receiving Agency shall administer and supervise appropriate special education instructional programs and services in accordance with the Iowa Department of Education rules and regulations and state laws governing such services and the delivery thereof (Ch. 273, 281, and 242, Code of Iowa). Receiving Agency shall retain the right to limit the enrollment of its classes.
2. The receiving Agency shall submit tuition statements on the following dates:

   _____.

   The cost will be prorated if the enrollment is for less than one school year. Proration shall be based on the number of days from the date of enrollment by the child relative to the number of days that classes are in session at Receiving Agency. Final payment shall be received no later than June 30 of each year.
3. Any change in the placement of the child covered by this agreement shall occur only after the IEP team and representatives of both Sending Agency and Receiving Agency have met to discuss all possible options for serving the child.
4. The term of this agreement shall be for the school year _____, according to Receiving Agency's calendar unless this agreement is mutually terminated sooner.
5. Enrollment records shall be maintained by Sending Agency, but all necessary records will be forwarded by Sending Agency to Receiving Agency upon the request of the Receiving Agency.
6. All transportation shall be provided by Sending Agency unless otherwise agreed and written.

Name of child _____

Date of birth _____ Date of enrollment _____

Parent /legal guardian _____

Parent/guardian phone number _____

EC teacher _____

Costs

Transportation _____ Tuition _____

Other costs as specified in the IEP

Paraprofessional _____ Assistive technology _____

Health _____ Staff development _____

Other (specify) _____

RECEIVING AGENCY

_____

EC Director Date

SENDING AGENCY

_____

LEA Administrator Date

_____

AEA Director Date